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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001228

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN; DRL

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [SCUL](#) [PHUM](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: AUCA STUDENTS WAITING AND WORRYING IN TURKMENABAT

REF: ASHGABAT 1049

Classified By: Charge Sylvia Reed Curran, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) On September 22, poloff met informally with six American University of Central Asia (AUCA) students during a drop-in visit to the American Corner in Turkmenabat, the capital of Lebap Province in eastern Turkmenistan. The students were recipients of scholarships from the Open Society Institute (OSI) and the Higher Education Support Program (HESP, also an OSI program), as well as self-funded. They were freshmen, sophomores and juniors, majoring in international and comparative politics, journalism, law and business administration. They chose to attend AUCA because of the availability of scholarships and its good faculty.

¶2. (C) Three of the students had been stopped at the airport at passport control when they attempted to return to Bishkek in August. Although they had heard in advance that some departing AUCA students had encountered problems, they had not known the details. These students and their families had not had access to much information about either the ban on their travel nor the efforts being made to resolve the situation. Some of their parents had called AUCA and been told that AUCA "was working on it." They were waiting for OSI to provide them with options, which the students said first of all meant getting off the Migration Service's "black list" that prevents them from leaving Turkmenistan. At a meeting convened by the Ministry of Education in Ashgabat, which some of these students attended, they said they'd been told they could transfer to schools in Bulgaria or Romania. They'd also been told that there was no need for them to study subjects such as American politics because such subjects were "not useful" in Turkmenistan, which has a different political system.

¶3. (C) One student called the government's restrictions a "straightforward violation of human rights." She said when students asked government officials for an explanation of the situation, the officials "reacted like a wall" and did not provide an answer. One student noted that the government's restrictions on study abroad contradicted its own goals about better education for Turkmen citizens, saying "look at our own (Turkmen) universities." A student said she had offered to give up her scholarship, but officials still would not

agree to allow her to go to Russia to study. The students said they want to study abroad even though they know that, upon their return to Turkmenistan, they will not be hired for government sector jobs and will have to work in the private sector or with international organizations. Most planned to pursue masters degrees after finishing at AUCA.

¶4. (C) Meanwhile, these students left clothing, computers and bank accounts in Bishkek, and had paid rent for their apartments. They felt that OSI was not being active enough on their behalf. They had heard about efforts being made on behalf of State Department-funded Turkmenistan AUCA Scholarship Program (TASP) scholarship recipients to allow them to continue their studies elsewhere. One student said her uncles were asking her what she was doing to defend her rights. Another said her father was willing "to give up everything" in order for her to be able to leave. Some students had started writing a letter to President Berdimuhamedov, but stopped because they thought such a letter might make things difficult for their families. Their neighbors were aware of their situation and kept asking them why they hadn't returned to school yet.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: These AUCA students in provincial Turkmenabat clearly feel isolated and abandoned. They're worried not only about the prospects for their academic progress at AUCA and the fate of their belongings left behind in Bishkek, but more generally about the long-term impact of being included on the government's "black list." The students demonstrated an awareness of their rights and outspokenness that suggests the real reason why the

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government has decided it has no use for AUCA graduates in Turkmenistan. END COMMENT.
CURRAN